

## Investigating freshmen's L2 speaking anxiety level in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

*The present study aims at investigating freshmen's English (hereafter is called L2) speaking anxiety level in the classroom. The data were derived from online survey on 155 freshmen on two English Education Departments in Palangka Raya. The result indicated that the freshmen were experiencing a high level of L2 speaking anxiety in the classroom. Further, the result of independent sample t-test analysis showed that there was no significant difference on freshmen's L2 speaking anxiety level by their gender. Similarly, one-way ANOVA analysis indicated that there was no a statistical difference on freshmen's L2 speaking anxiety by English learning experience. Considering the findings, a high level of speaking anxiety is a serious problem to measure as it will make students disinclined to L2 speaking activities leading to poor L2 speaking fluency.*

*Keywords* : L2 speaking anxiety, freshmen, English Education Department

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking skill mastery is usually perceived as a parameter of success in L2 learning (Richards, 2008). However, enhancing L2 speaking mastery is quite challenging as internal and external factors involved. In non-English speaking country, majority of the language learners possess a moderate level of speaking anxiety because of considerable factors (Akkakoson, 2016; Daud et al., 2019, Erdina et al., 2020). This condition potentially harms students' L2 speaking development as they may become reluctant to participate in English communication.

Considering this situation, it is necessary to acknowledge speaking anxiety level of freshmen in English Education Department as they are prone to show moderate to high speaking anxiety level. It is because most of the freshmen in Palangka Raya, Indonesia did

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not graduate from English major. Furthermore, during high school, English is perceived as a subject matter instead of a medium of instruction. In other words, they lack of experience to English-speaking activities. Meanwhile, in university level, particularly in English Education Department, English is not only learned but also used as a medium of instruction. This transition potentially leads to a high level of speaking anxiety.

### *1.1. Defining L2 Speaking Anxiety*

As an attempt to describe the notion of anxiety, Spielberger (1983: 4) urges that, “anxiety refers to the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system”. In other words, these refer to what people feel when they become anxious. To extend our understanding, it is also essential to look at another point of view, especially about how anxiety emerges.

According to Pappamihel (2002), anxiety is a result of assessing threats in certain conditions. Put it simply, anything that we see as a threat is a potential cause of anxiety. From these two definitions, anxiety can be described as unpleasant feeling as a response to certain things surrounding us which we perceive threatening.

In EFL setting, speaking is considered as one of the most anxiety-provoking activities by EFL learners. As conceptualized by He (2018: 4), L2 Speaking Anxiety is “an individual’s fear or nervousness associated with either real or anticipated oral communication in a foreign language with another person or persons”. In other words, L2 Speaking Anxiety refers to one’s apprehension and nervousness when speaking English with person or persons.

### *1.2. The Possible Causes of L2 Speaking Anxiety*

Since L2 speaking is seen as anxiety-provoking activities, considerable studies tried to describe this situation in their setting. Akkakoson (2016) reported that EFL students in Thai demonstrated a moderate level of speaking anxiety in the classroom. He postulates that the students have not seen the advantages of being involved in English communication. Similarly, in Indonesia, a study by Erdina et al. (2020) revealed that junior high school students showed a moderate level of speaking anxiety in the classroom. They reported that this situation is caused by fear of making mistakes, fear of negative assessments, and poor confidence.

In different setting in Indonesia, Daud et al. (2019) attempted to measure pre-service English teachers’ speaking anxiety level. It is evidenced that the participants also moderately

experienced speaking anxiety. The result of qualitative data analysis indicated that social, linguistics, and personal factors are the reasons to their anxiety.

On the other hand, Öztürk and Gurbuz (2014) reported that Turkish pre-intermediate students at an English preparatory program possess speaking anxiety at the low level. They argued that the participants have developed awareness of the advantages of speaking English, so they have been trying to improve their ability in speaking English leading to a low level of anxiety. Comparing to a study by Akkakoson (2016), EFL learners' perception on English-speaking activities are linked to their L2 speaking anxiety level.

Interestingly, EFL learners' speaking anxiety level seem to differ by demographic variables, such as gender and English learning experience. In Iran, a statistical analysis showed that females' anxiety level was significantly higher than males in impromptu speaking activities (Mohtahsam and Farnia, 2017). Similarly, based on independent sample *t*-test, female Taiwanese university students are more anxious in speaking English than males (Tien, 2018). Furthermore, Tien (2018) also found that learners who have more years of English learning are less anxious in speaking English.

Previous studies indicate that most language learners from non-English speaking country demonstrate English-speaking anxiety at moderate level. There are various factors to this situation and mostly are related to their poor self-perceived competence in English. This situation is possibly harmful for their English-speaking development if they are reluctant to participate in English-speaking activities. Concerning to this situation, the English teachers or instructors should acknowledge their students' condition in their classroom.

Therefore, this study is intended to investigate the level of freshmen's L2 speaking anxiety level in English Education Department and the research questions are formulated as follows:

**Research Questions 1:**

Do the Indonesian freshmen in English Education Department experience a high level of L2 speaking anxiety in language classroom?

**Research Questions 2:**

Is there any significant difference on the Indonesian freshmen's L2 speaking anxiety by their gender?

**Research Questions 3:**

Is there any significant difference on the Indonesian freshmen's L2 speaking anxiety by their English learning experience?

## 2. METHODS

The target participants of this study were recruited from two English Education Departments in Palangka Raya by using convenience sampling. The total participants of each department were 112 and 111 respectively so, there were 223 participants in total, and they aged around 19.

### 2.1. Instrument and Data Analysis

To measure the freshmen's L2 Speaking Anxiety level, 16 items of a 4-graded scale by Öztürk and Gurbuz (2014) were used. A total score under 11 shows a low level of in-class L2 speaking anxiety; a total score between 11 and 20 demonstrates a moderate level; and a total score above 21 indicates a high level.

**Table 1.** The Summary of CFA results and Reliability of L2 Speaking Anxiety Scale

Items	SA	t-value
3. I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in English classes.	.79	-
5. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English classes.	.79	10.53
6. I get embarrassed to volunteer answers in English classes.	.64	8.28
9. I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in English classes.	.71	9.32
12. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in English classes.	.79	10.54
13. I get nervous when I don't understand every word my English lecturer says.	.73	9.55
15. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	.73	9.56
16. I get nervous when the English lecturer asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	.74	9.83
<b>p-value</b>	<b>.12</b>	
<b>RMSEA</b>	<b>.05</b>	
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>.91</b>	

The result of CFA for L2 Speaking Anxiety showed that the model fit the data (**p-value** > .05; **RMSEA** = .05; **t-value** > 1.96;  $\lambda$  > .50). Item 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 14 were deleted from the construct and only 8 out of 16 items retained in the final structure as depicted on the table. The reliability of the scale was .91 and it is considered high.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Indonesian freshmen's L2 speaking anxiety level

The first research question of the study aimed at measuring the level of Indonesian freshmen's L2 speaking anxiety in the classroom and by using the scale by Öztürk and Gurbuz (2014), it was found that the total score ranged from 8-31. The results of the scale were then analyzed by using descriptive statistics to determine the level of participants' L2 speaking anxiety level. The statistical results are presented below.

**Table 2.** Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	107	69.0	69.0	69.0
	Male	48	31.0	31.0	100.0
	Total	155	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3.** L2 Speaking Anxiety

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-10	6	3.9	3.9	3.9
	11-20	57	36.8	36.8	40.6
	21-32	92	59.4	59.4	100.0
	Total	155	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows that the total participants who submitted the online survey were 155 out of 223 or about 69.5 % of the total population. The number of female participants who participated in this study were 69% (107) and the males were 31% (48).

As presented on Table 3, the number of participants who performed a low level of L2 speaking anxiety were less than 5% and those who experienced a moderate level of L2 speaking anxiety were 36.8%. Meanwhile, the number of participants who indicated a high level of L2 speaking anxiety is more than half of the participants, that is 59.4%. This result is in contrast to previous findings (Akkakoson, 2016; Daud et al., 2019; Erdina et al., 2020; & Öztürk and Gurbuz, 2014).

As the participants of the study were freshmen, they were possibly experiencing language learning transition from senior high school level to university level. The reason to this is because English in Indonesia is taught as a subject matter. It is not used as language instruction, so there is limited opportunity for students to use English. Meanwhile, at English Education Department, English is not only learned but also used as a language instruction.

This situation possibly the reason why they feel highly anxious when they are asked to communicate using English in the classroom.

### 3.2. L2 speaking anxiety level by gender

An independent sample *t*-test analysis was conducted to examine research question 2, if there is significant difference on Indonesian freshmen's L2 speaking anxiety in the classroom by their gender.

**Table 4.** Independent Sample *t*-test Analysis  
Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
L2 Speaking Anxiety	Female	107	21.24	5.710	.552
	Male	48	22.96	4.833	.698

**Table 5.** Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
L2 Speaking Anxiety	Equal variances assumed	.868	.353	-1.810	153	.072	-1.715	.948	-3.588	.157
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.928	105.872	.057	-1.715	.890	-3.479	.048

As depicted on Table 5, the independent sample *t*-test analysis showed that there is no significant difference on students' L2 speaking anxiety level by their gender  $t(153) = -1.810$ ,  $p = .072$ . The result of present study is in opposite to previous findings by Mohtahsam and Farnia (2017) and Tien (2018). Although gender does not seem to differ significantly in this setting, it is still necessary to recognize other factors related to L2 speaking anxiety.

### 3.3. L2 speaking anxiety level by English learning experience

To address research question 3, if there is a significant difference on freshmen's L2 speaking anxiety by English-learning experience, a one-way ANOVA analysis was run.

**Table 6.** One-way ANOVA Analysis

Descriptive								
L2_Speaking_Anxiety								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Science	82	21.70	4.998	.552	20.60	22.79	8	32
Social	41	21.93	6.247	.976	19.96	23.90	8	32
Language	19	23.21	5.084	1.166	20.76	25.66	16	31
Others	13	19.69	6.486	1.799	15.77	23.61	8	28
Total	155	21.77	5.496	.441	20.90	22.65	8	32

**Table 7.** Test of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
L2_Speaking_Anxiety	Based on Mean	1.767	3	151	.156
	Based on Median	1.736	3	151	.162
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.736	3	147.904	.162
	Based on trimmed mean	1.773	3	151	.155

**Table 8.** ANOVA

L2_Speaking_Anxiety					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	97.011	3	32.337	1.072	.363
Within Groups	4554.086	151	30.160		
Total	4651.097	154			

The English Education Department is highly favored by non-Language major students as 82 were graduated from Science major; 41 from Social major; and 13 from other majors, such as Culinary and Accounting. There were only 19 freshmen who were graduated from Language major. This indicated that more than half of the total participants appears to have a lack of English learning experience. However, it was found that there was no a statistical difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA analysis ( $F(3,151)=1.072, p=.363$ ).

Although they vary in English learning experience, they seem to perceive speaking activities the same way, that is anxiety-provoking. Perhaps, in Indonesia, English is learned as a foreign language, so there is limited exposure to the English communication. In other words, they have less opportunity to create and participate in L2 communication. Further, due to limited exposure to the English communication, freshmen who were from Language

major did not necessarily manifest their interest of English through speaking skill. It can be manifested through other skills, such as reading or writing.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Experiencing speaking anxiety in target language is normal, especially if the students with lack of experience in English communication are pushed to speak in English. This situation may lead to a high level of speaking anxiety level that makes students avoid to create or participate in English communication. However, bearing in mind that they are prospective teachers of English, English proficiency is highly required skill to have. Therefore, it is lecturers' responsibility to consider students' L2 speaking anxiety level and to create free or low-anxiety environment, so students will become more willing to create or participate in English speaking activities. Moreover, to enrich information about L2 speaking anxiety construct, further research may need to explore other influential factors to students' L2 speaking anxiety.

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